WILL THE REAL ADAM PLEASE STAND UP?
Psalm 8
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Loren Eisely used to tell a story once about Thomas Huxley, who was a disciple of Charles Darwin. A friend had called at the Huxley house only to discover the great man leavin in a hurry. "Where are you going?" he asked; to which Huxley responded, "To tell people they are all apes." Eisely would comment: "It's easy to convince people they are monkeys. The difficult thing is to persuade them that they are human beings."

That is hardly academic today. More than a century after the publication of The Origin of the Species and more than 50 years after the Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tennessee, the issue is very much in the public eye. Two events in particular punctuate the immediacy of the subject. In a recent California lawsuit, the "Creation Science Research Center" challenged the teaching of evolution in public school science classes as the only explanation for the origin of things. The state won the suit, but only at the cost of calling evolution a theory, a ruling that has frightening implications about the role of neutral, objective scientific inquiry in public education. Text books have already been revised, school boards are glancing nervously over their shoulders, and just last week the Arkansas Legislature passed a law mandating the teaching of divine creation in the schools of the state. The creationists insist that Genesis 1 and 2 are literal accounts - biologically and geographical true, and that any evidence to the contrary must be false. Creationists insist that Darwin and religion are incompatable. What that means, too often, is that religion and science - religion and objective truth appear to be in conflict. Creationists are also convinced that the idea of evolution is somehow related to a multitude of other societal ills. Time Magazine quoted a Georgia Judge to the effect that, "This monkey mythology of Darwin's is the cause of permissiveness, promiscuity, pills, prophylactics, perversion, pregnancies, abortions, pornotherapy, pollution, poisoning and proliferation of crime." (Time, 3/16/81, p.81).

The tragedy is that once again religion is publically associated with ignorance. Once again it is necessary to assert that there are many of us who believe in God and who know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and who do not regard Darwin's ideas as threat, but in fact regard them as the best evidence we have as to how we got here and who, furthermore, see in the incredible process of evolution an affirmation of God's providence and care and constant creativity, not a denial of it.

That is the first event that signals the relevance of the question. The second is a bit more modest, but fascinating nevertheless: the publication of a book with the intriguing title Lucy: The Beginnings of Humankind. Lucy is the name given to a discovery in Ethiopia of dozens of bones belonging to a creature 3½ feet tall, with a head the size of a softball, who walked on two legs and used hands to care for her infants. The stunning thing about Lucy is that she pre-dates Homo sapiens - us, who appeared about 100,000 years ago - by 3.5 million years. Lucy was walking around on the earth a very long time ago and in the words of one reviewer, "while she might not have been human, she was on her way." (Time, 3/16/81).

Behind both - the emergence of the Creationist Movement and the continuing scientific research which documents repeatedly our partnership, our belongingness, to the natural order of things, is the question, "Who are we? What does it mean to be human?" According to James Angell, next to "What's for dinner?" it's the oldest question in human history. Listen to one of the answers; at least 2,500 years old. Psalm 8...

O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth!
Thou whose glory above the heavens is chanted
by the mouth of babes and infants,
thou hast founded a bulwark because of thy foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.
When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
the moon and the stars which thou has established;

what is man that thou art mindful of him,
    and the son of man that thou dost care for him ?
Yet thou hast made him little less than God,
    and dost crown him with glory and honor.
Thou hast given him dominion over the work of thy hands;
    thou hast put all things under his feet,
all sheep and oxen,
    and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
    whatever passes along the paths of the sea.
O Lord, our Lord,
    how majestic is thy name in all the earth! (Psalm 8).

As far as the scholars can tell Psalm 8 is a kind of all-purpose Hymn of Praise used, apparently, during one of Israel's night festivals. It feels like a hymn that might have been sung or chanted antiphonally. It's only speculation, obviously, but can't you imagine a congregation gathered out of doors, under a night sky, with a million stars twinkling overhead,and a priest intones"what is man, what is woman - that thou art mindful of them?" and a choir responds "yet thou hast made them little less than God...Thou has given them dominion..

The Psalm begins and ends with the majesty of the creator. It moves from contemplation of nature's magnificence to the ancient mystery: "In light of all this, who are we?" And ther it makes a series of strong affirmations about humanity: "created a little less than God, crowned with dignity and honor, granted dominion over creation."

The Biblical view of human nature is mixed. Psalm 8 is a representation of one school: call it the "child of God" school. Men and women, here, are Lordly, striding through creatior like Adam in Genesis 1, naming all the animals, clearly the boss. Men and women are powerful in this view, molders and movers and shakers, they share with God himself the ongoing process of creation.

There is another view, however. Let's call it the"child of the earth" school:like the Ada in the second chapter of Genesis, this man and woman have an egalitarian role in the line of creation, part of the whole process; the man made out of dirt, of all things, the woman from the man's rib. This other Adam is Lord of nothing. Rather, someone has written, primal couple appear in Genesis 2 as the gardener and wife, not King and Queen of Creation.

There really are two distinct views of humankind in the Bible. Both, I would submit, are critically true. Even though they appear to be opposite from one another, both must be kept alive. Neither is adequate alone.

The prime problem, however, is that the Biblical view hasn't even been in the picture for more than a century. Read the ads in any slick magazine this week: that is who we are: that is how we define ourselves. Homo-consumer: Homo-accumulator: "Belly fillers", Harvey Stegemoeller, President of Capital University, calls us. An ad in last Sunday's Times was eloquent in its simplicity: a Red Ferrari sports car and one line of script, in classic white "only those who dare - truly live". That is who we are. And the point is that the Biblical view, this double-edged sword, this "child of God - child of earth" business isn't even in the room where the decisions are being made.

Three giants have dominated the conversation for a century. Darwin, cold, rational scientist - "a human is a predator, whose natural instinct is to kill with a weapon." Freud, probing the labyrinth of the mind: "A human is a creature who lives by the irrational needs, urges of our unconscious." And, of course, Karl Marx: "Human beings are creatures of the society they create." The point is that the Christian view doesn't ever get foot in the door.

Human beings are for fighting and killing; or they are consumers for buying and accumulating; or they are automatons whose purpose is to serve the state or party; or they are merely an accumulation of glands and hormones whose greatest joy is to do their own thing. A Judeo-Christian voice has a hard time getting heard - not just in an academic debate and searching classroom, but where decisions are made: in Board rooms, government chambers, executive offic

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Perhaps that is changing. Perhaps, we, in our time, have an opportunity to say a word about the human condition from our perspective. The Wall Street Journal thought so several years ago in an editorial that contained this interesting suggestion: "Nothing the behaviorist psychologists have discovered in their rat mazes, for instance,will tell you as much about human nature as will the Judeo-Christian view of man, created in the image of God but marred by original sin." (See The Gospel According to the Wall Street Journal,C.S.Calian,p.22)

Who is the real Adam and Eve? What is the truth about us?

We are children of the earth, part of the created order, bound to it in a very critical way, accountable to it ultimately: "from dust we came and from dust we return" - no doubt about that. Part of the Biblical view has to do with our humility, our smallness. James Luther Mays says, "To be human is to glimpse the significance of our insignificance." Sometimes it simply breaks into our consciousness, unexpectedly - while listening to great music or seeing great art; and sometimes it happens while lying on your back and actually looking up into that black, limitless nothingness, that starry magnificance, receding into infinity at the speed of light. And sometimes it happens if you watch a baby being born or if you are privileged to witness an infant contemplating the surprising mystery of his or her own hand. And sometimes it happens when you see someone die or when you know love and from somewhere deep inside yourself you hear a voice not totally your own, "O Lord - how majestic is thy nam When I consider the work of your hands, who am I that you care about me?"

You know, a funny thing happened to the human race on the way to getting smart. We realized how little we know. Astrophysicist Robert Jastrow writes "Astronomers have proven that the creation of the universe is the result of forces beyond the reach of scientific inquiry." (Time, 3/16/81). And in a recent essay in Theology Today, Conrad Hyers put it in a delightful paragraph: "If only we could have landed on the moon when it was still near the edge of the canopy of the sky! If only the telescopes which brought the planets into the earth's orbit did not also notice quasars! If only archeology had unearthed Adam's bones and not those of Pithecanthropos let alone 150,000 years of dinosaur remains! What lords and masters of that cozy kingdom of our early imaginings we could have been!" (Theology Today 10/80, p.323).

Part of what the Bible says about us is that we are simply part of the natural order of things; made of dust subject to nature, related to every other living thing. But that won't stand alone. We've certainly given it a try lately. Within the Christian community there has always been a strong tendency to romanticize human nature, to put all the emphasis on the "child of the earth" school. Part of that tendency shows up in well meaning attempts to get "back to nature",to affirm our creatureliness by planting organic gardens, seasoning with sea salt and snacking on granola bars. It is expressed in the proverbial attempt to leave the dirty, messy, ambiguity of life on the fast track and find oneself in a primal wilderness, or at least a cabin in Maine with central heating. The trouble is that we are only partially children of the earth. Lucy, in fact, stood up and walked and made decisions and rearranged the rocks better to sit and cradle her child. The noble savage, the innocent pure child of nature is a myth. He never was altogether noble. We are not, Lewis Thomas points out in his essays, perfect. Cats are perfect. Goldfish make no mistakes. We are human. We err; we mess things up. We dream and hope and plan far short and then must live with guilt and inadequacy and alone in the universe with our awareness of our own death.

And so the Bible says we are not only children of the earth, we are also children of God. The Adam and Eve in Genesis 1 stride through creation. We may not want it, but we have dominion. We dominate the creation, naming the other creatures, effecting them by what we do and don't do. We have within our grasp a form of mastery and we have used it. We have, with incredible insensitivity sometimes, killed off whole species; we have rearranged the landscape, blasted tunnels, clawed minerals out of the dirt, dammed rivers, erected sky-scrapers, covered the earth with concrete: we have built hospitals and concert halls and rockets to outer space and electron microscopes: we have built schools and churches and houses. The ancient Psalmist could not have known the dramatic truth of his words: "Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands." We are, he maintained, little less than God. Thus Shakespeare:

> "What a piece of work is man
> How noble in reason,
> How infinite in faculty,
> In form and moving how express and admirable,
> In action how like an angel,
> In apprehension how like a god."

But that won't stand alone either. If we are not totally defined as children of the earth, we are not only exalted either. Conrad Hyers writes: "The same fire that warms homes and propels rockets and lights candles is the fire that burned in the furnaces of Auschwitz and Bucherwald, decimated the cities of Europe, incinerated Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and Napalmed Vietnam." (Op.cit., p.321).

We have, in fact, used God given dominance to exploit the rest of the creation from chemical wastes seeping into the ground, to shooting four ounce birds to strewing aluminum beer cans along our highways. We have used our dominance of creator to define human nature and it takes a comedian sometimes to puncture our pretensions. It was Dick Gregory who said about us, "You gotta say this about us: our self-confidence knows no bounds. Who else could go to a small island in the Pacific where there is no poverty, no war, and no worry, no unemployment, no hunger, and call it a primitive society?"

The Christian position is that there are two of us. We are child of earth - and child of God. We cannot be either one solely without disastrous results. The wisdom of our faith is to keep both Adams - both Eves - alive, in tension. The word Christian faith has to offer the ancient debate today is that we are called to be both, and to be both by exercising accountability to the rest of creation of which we are a part, and to the God who created us.

That responsibility, may I submit, is not an abstraction. It means that the Board of Directors of the company, Christianly speaking, cannot be responsible to the stockholders alone. It means that there are and must be claims on our responsibility other than profits and production. This created order has rights too. It means that banks are responsible for something more than balance sheets. It means that governments, schools, churches cannot function simply on the basis of expediency and balanced budgets, but should and must be responsible partners in the whole created order.

The Christian Gospel is that there is a division in all of us. I have characterized it as a dichotomy between our identity as children of the earth and children of God. It can also be defined as saint and sinner, or as St. Paul did so eloquently, as the private war in all of us between what we know we should do and what we want to do: what we will and what we do.

Christianity says that God has provided for a reconciliation, a wholeness, a new creation. Christianity is the suggestion that in Jesus Christ - believing in Him, following Him, accepting His Lordship - a whole new creation begins to happen, even in the context of your life and mine. St. Paul called Jesus Christ the new Adam and the Gospel suggests that He is what God means by human nature and that in following Him we discover our own full humanity.

The ancient Psalm submitted that the glory of every man and woman was in the fact that God was mindful of them. So, the Gospel of Jesus Christ sees more potential in humanity, values individual men and women more, strives to protect, preserve and support every member of the human family, precisely because we know that God has been supremely mindful of us in Jesus Christ. That is the ground and final foundation of our faith. That out of the magnificence of the whole created order God has been mindful of you and me.

A professor of mine once said, "There is something about human nature that is defined by the fact that it has been visited by the divine." (Mays, Union Theological Seminary). And long before him an ancient Saint, whose words take on new power because of a Christ and a cross...

"What is man and woman that thou art mindful of them?
O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth."
Amen.

Lord God, grant us honesty about ourselves. Help us to affirm both our belonging to creation and our belonging to you. And help us in these days of Lent, to rethink, and redefine and renew our faith, our loyalties, our lives - in the light of your love. In Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.